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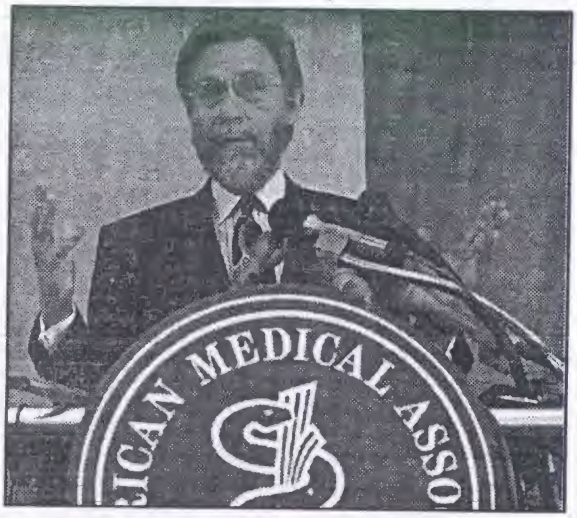

NO JOY OF SEX: Bad timing does in longtime JAMA editor Dr. George Lundberg, shown in 1992 photo. AP

AMA boots editor over sex survey

By ANDY GELLER

The American Medical Association axed the editor of its magazine yesterday for publishing a study saying 60 percent of college students agree with President Clinton that oral sex isn't real sex.

The AMA, a powerful lobby that represents doctors in Congress, said Dr. George Lundberg was fired for publishing the article to coincide with Clinton's impeachment trial.

Lundberg, who edited The Journal of the American Medical Association for 17 years, "inappropriately and inexcusably interjected JAMA into the middle of a debate that has nothing to do with science or medicine," the AMA said.

The 65-year-old Lundberg declined to comment. The author of the article, June Reinisch, said she was stunned.

The AMA acted after an Internet Web site, The Junk Science Home Page, ran a story about the study on Thursday, breaking an embargo JAMA had set for next Tuesday.

"Politically convenient science? As Matt Drudge would say, 'Developing hard,'" the Web-site story said.

Robert Knight, director of cultural studies for the Family Research Council, said, "This has all the earmarks of the Iraqi bombings in terms of timing."

At a news conference at AMA headquarters in Chicago, Executive Vice President Ratcliffe Anderson Jr. said the firing was based on the rush to get the study into print, not on its scientific merits.

He said Lundberg "was focused on sensationalism, not journalism" and he apologized for the article's timing.

The article, to be published next week, was titled, "Would You Say You 'Had Sex' If . . .?"

The study of 600 college students, interviewed in 1991 at a major Midwestern university, found that 60 percent of them did not consider oral sex as having "had sex."

During his grand-jury testimony, President Clinton said oral sex was not one of the acts covered in a definition of sexual relations devised for the Paula Jones sex-harassment suit.

Reinisch, who conducted the research and wrote the article, said if Lundberg had held up its publication, he would have been accused of hiding relevant data.

"I'm absolutely shocked," said Reinisch, retired director of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction in Bloomington, Ind.

"This may have to do with issues of academic freedom. There was nothing unusual about this paper."

Reinisch said several colleagues had urged her to prepare a paper after the issue of whether oral sex was sex was raised during the Clinton scandal. The article briefly refers to the current public debate on the question.

The 1991 data were part of a survey containing 102 items on various aspects of behavior associated with transmission of sex-related diseases.

White House press secretary Joe Lockhart, asked about the firing, replied: "I think that clearly is an internal matter for the AMA to deal with. And I think they're in the best position to decide what's appropriate."